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Missionary Society of Inquiry

On the origin, progress and present state of the Jesuits mission in Paraguay.

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Beloved Brethren,

The subject of missions, will ever be interesting to the people of God. To them it must be highly gratifying to hear of savage nations, however distant, laying aside their corrupt habits, and ferocious dispositions, which so much debase human nature; and putting on the gentleness of the Lamb. When we peruse ancient history, and contemplate the labours, and perseverence of those men, who have entered into the work of missions with all their heart, and notwithstanding the many obstacles, which stood in their way, braved every danger, so that they might accomplish their pious undertakings, and complete their designs, by civilizing and christianizing various parts of the world. —— I say

when we contemplate these things, and see the rapid progress, which they have made; it adds new vigour and gives every encouragement to those servants of Christ, who feel a willingness to enter the same field, and prosecute the same glorious plan; to pursue their pious attempts; and while they look into Jesus, He will undoubtedly crown their labours also with success. And here, it would not be improper to observe, that Paraguay, which opens the field for our report, is situated between the 12th and 27th degree of south latitude; and is bounded by Amazonia, on the north; by Brasil east; by Patagonia on the south; and by Peru and Chili west. This vast region, although it abounds in all the variety of the earth; yet, it is very unhealthy, on account of the low lands

which are under water great part of the year, and morasses, that constantly corrupt the air by their stagnated waters. The inhabitants of this tract of territory are represented by travelers, as a roving people, who are stupid, fickle, perfidious, and voracious; much addicted to intemperance, and excessively indolent. As to their religion it is much like that of their brethren, the Peruvians, who worshiped the sun. This country never was fully explored and in short was not known to Europeans until Sabastian Cabot discovered it in the year 1526, who passed from Rio-de-la Plata, to the river Parana in small barks, and thence entered the river called Uruguay. It is very remarkable, that though the Spaniards had conquered the greatest part of Mexico and Peru by the force of arms;

~~the greatest part of Mexico and~~ Peru, ~~by the force of arms~~; yet they unable to subdue the inhabitants of Paraguay. This people perceiving the treachery of their new friends, and always being accustomed to the sweets of freedom, rose up like hyders from every quarter, to drive the usurpers from their native soil. The Spaniards were so much harrassed by the natives, that to save their lives, were often obliged to keep close within the boundaries of their forts and seek protection under the cover of their guns. But by receiving repeted supplies from their mother country, they were enabled to gain upon them a little and by little; and at last built several towns, and then they were perfectly secure, but often in the utmost danger of being overcome by the savage tribes. For nearly half a century, this country was little else, but

one field of blood. The repeated sallies of the natives and that of the invaders would exhibit a most horrid picture. But the scene of cruelty was soon closed when men entered their territory, unattended with implements of blood and manifesting to them by all the signs of freendship, that they came for the express purpose to do them good. About the middle of the 16th century, the Jesuits under took the ardous task of subduing the natives, not by the sword of steel, but by the word of God. These few inofensive men, not only set an example to christendom, but astonished the world; for they actually done more, towards the subdugestion of the natives, than all in a few years, than all Spain could have done in a whole century by the force of arms. These men were Labarous and active in the

prosecution of their plan, beyond all description. They travelled several hundred miles through swamps and deserts and cheerfully endured all kinds of hardships ~~so that~~ from the want of proper nourishment; so that they might collect and administer comfort to the fugatives, who fled from the face of tyranick power. It is said, in this way, they were the happy instruments of converting fifty Indian families, who soon induced many others to follow their example. The Jesuits spared no pains to make them as comfortable as possible, and instruct them in all the useful arts, by which they were soon raised from the savage of the wood to civilized men. In possess of time, they established a very handsome an extensive colony, consisting of several towns and inhabited by 350, 000 families; converts

to those ministers of the church of Rome; and subjects to the king of Spain. But the Jesuits at first labored under many disadvantages, and found by experience, that they could not be successful in their attempts to make them embrace the gospel and submit to the restraints of a civilized life; unless the Spaniards, who never failed to poison the minds of the natives by their wicked example, were prohibited to enter the colony. To effect this, the Jesuits, applied to the king of Spain, and informed him, that the want of success in their missions, was chiefly owing to the scandle, which the immorality of the Spaniards, together with their insolent hatered that their insolent behaveors excited in the Indians and that if these obstacles were removed, the

empire of the gospel might be extended into the most unknown parts, and that all the country might be subdued to his Catholic Majestys obedience without expense and without force.
The king of Spain granted them their request and gave orders to all the governors of their respective Provinces not to interfere, nor suffer any Spaniard or foreigner, to enter upon missionary ground, without express permission from the Jesuits. This had its due effect, for soon this roving people were brought to delight in the sweets of domestic life; the stupid and perfidious put on the vestures of uprightness and truth; the voracious and the intemperate, meekness and sobriety.
There never was yet a colony in so short a time, and under such circumstances, so well organized

so promising and grew to such splendor as that under the Jesuits. They erected and adorned several churches, which were not inferior to the most splendid of Peru, and established schools in all their districts in which the people were taught to read, write and all kinds of music. "They were very careful to consult the natural bents and genius of their pupils, and in directing their studies and applications accordingly." The young men of the most promising genius, were taught the Latin tongue, in which they became very expert, and in short, there was no art in the mother country, but what the Jesuits introduced into the rising colony; even the art of war, they did not neglect, for it is said that the Jesuits could bring into the field, 70, or 80 000, well disciplined troops. And it was the introduction of this very art, which destroyed one of the most promising

colonies in the world. For political jealousy soon made its way into the court of Madrid and suspecting the rising splendor of the new colony formed by the Jesuits would one day aspire after absolute independance, and throw off the power, under whose protection it had been nursed, ceded it to the King of Portugal in exchange for Saint Sacrament to which the Jesuits refused to comply, or to suffer themselves to be transfered from one soverign to another, without their own consent; at which the natives flew to arms and were resolved to sacrifice their life in defence of their rights; but being defeated by the European troops with great slaughter and the Jesuits removed by royal authority, the colony fell to utter ruin; and the remnant that escaped the edge of the sword were placed on the same footing with the rest of the inhabitants of the country. This took place, in the year 1771. As for further information on this subject, I could find none. S. Moss